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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TALLINN 000169

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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AMGT, EN

SUBJECT: H1N1 STRIKES AMERICAN STUDENT GROUP IN ESTONIA

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¶1. Summary. H1N1 has emerged among a U.S. school group comprised of 33 high school students and 3 teachers (all American citizens except for one) traveling through Estonia on a bus trip through Eastern Europe. The group's plans to continue from Estonian to Latvia were delayed when five tested positive for the H1N1 influenza virus. Although none is showing serious symptoms, those testing positive have agreed to health authorities' recommendation to be admitted to the hospital in Tallinn, in order to ensure appropriate isolation. The remaining members of the group continued on to Latvia on June 26, except for one teacher who stayed behind to monitor the recovery of the five who are hospitalized. Post expects some media interest to develop as news of the incident spreads. End Summary.

¶2. A group of 33 students from the United States, accompanied by 3 teachers, arrived in St. Petersburg earlier this week to begin a two-week trip through Europe. They arrived in Tallinn on June 23 and checked into the Meriton Conference & Spa Hotel in Tallinn. The same day, four of the students complained of not feeling well. On June 24, after visiting a local doctor, the four students were referred to the West Tallinn Central Hospital, which has been designated by the Estonian government to test for and treat H1N1 influenza. Of the four students tested on June 24, two tested positive for H1N1 (one an American citizen and the other a tri-national holding British, French and Canadian passports).

¶3. On June 25, all of the students and teachers returned to the West Tallinn Central Hospital for further evaluation. Fifteen American students and one teacher complained of mild flu symptoms, such as sore throat or mild fever, and these individuals were tested and isolated for several hours while laboratory analysis was carried out. Of these, three more students tested positive for H1N1. In total, five students remain hospitalized, while those who tested negative have left the hospital. One teacher will stay in Tallinn to monitor the hospitalized students' recovery. All members of the student/teacher group were prescribed prophylaxis doses of Tamiflu.

¶4. Given the mild symptoms, the Estonian Health Protection Inspectorate did not obligate the hospitalization of students or isolation of members of the group while test results were pending. Rather, members of the group agreed voluntarily to comply with recommendations of the health authorities not to return to the hotel without a "negative" test result for H1N1. We understand that Inspectorate personnel visited the hotel to discuss the matter with hotel staff.

¶5. The student group was organized by a Spokane-based organization "People to People International" which, after much deliberation, determined that the healthy students should continue on their tour. The group will visit Riga (26 June), Vilnius (27-28 June), Warsaw (29-30 June), Krakow (1-2 July), Prague (3-4 July) and Berlin (5-7 July). Some of the students currently recovering in Tallinn may try to rejoin the group upon release from the hospital.

¶6. Post has remained in frequent contact with members of the affected group, as well as with the Estonian Health Protection Inspectorate and the treating physicians at the West Tallinn Central Hospital. Post has also discussed the matter with representatives of People to People International. Conoff visited the hospital on June 25 (taking appropriate precautions, as recommended by Embassy nurse and hospital personnel) when 18 members of the group were isolated while saliva samples were being analyzed in a local laboratory. Post has also kept consuls in Riga, Vilnius, Warsaw, Krakow, Prague and Berlin apprised of developments.

¶7. On June 26, the Estonian Health Protection Inspectorate placed general information about the outbreak on its

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website, as it has done for the five previously reported H1N1 cases in Estonia. Post expects the website posting to generate media interest in the matter, although Post has received no press inquiries thus far.

DECKER